



INTRODUCTION TO CLI-FI: A NEW TYPE OF FICTION TO ADDRESS A NEW TYPE OF REALITY

*Mr. Jose Joseph¹, Ms. Kiran Jose²

¹ Assistant Professor of English, Christ College of Science and Management, Malur, India (Corresponding Author)

² Assistant Professor of English, Christ College of Science and Management, Malur, India

ABSTRACT

Over the past couple of decades, literature focusing on climate change has emerged as a significant trend in English-language publishing and readership. This genre is now commonly referred to as climate fiction, or Cli-fi. By the end of the twentieth century, environmentalists and cultural critics were rightly questioning why authors—and artists more broadly—weren't more engaged with this pressing issue. A decade later, a substantial number of works addressing both natural and human-caused climate change were being published across the globe. This surge in artistic and academic interest in climate change fiction is driven by the increasingly evident climatic changes we experience daily. Additionally, there is hope that these plays, novels, short stories, poems, and children's books might foster greater climate awareness, potentially influencing a more optimistic and actionable approach to environmental policy and politics.

The objective of this research paper is to explore and trace the emergence and development of climate fiction as a literary genre. It seeks to examine how climate fiction originated, the factors that contributed to its rise, and how it has evolved over time to become a significant part of contemporary literature.

KEYWORDS: Cli-Fi, Climate Fiction, Trans-Disciplinary Perspectives, Humanities and Literature

INTRODUCTION

Every society and every age has its own problems, and the artists and writers of that period address them with much care. Taking this technology-struck twenty-first century in consideration, the greatest threat that our world faces is the environmental issues and climatic changes. Environment is a great part of human life. And this dissertation is a humble attempt to analyze how these environmental issues are addressed in literature. Cli-fi or climate change fictions are a new development in this field. The emergence of cli-fi (an abbreviation in analogy with 'sci-fi' apparently coined by the journalist and film maker Dan Bloom in 2007) as a new genre of fiction and film, reflecting but also to a degree informing views and shaping conversations on climate change. Climate change fiction, sometimes called cli-fi, is populated, certainly, by characters that interact with the environment. But that's not enough. To be Climate change fiction, a story needs to explicitly assess humanity's impact on nature that ultimately results in climatic change or environmental hazards. Climate change fiction comes in two categories: 'what is' and 'what might be'. 'What Is' encompasses the present and the past. It tells a story based on observable facts. 'What Might Be' focuses those facts into the future. It uses details to teach a lesson, often a cautionary tale, of what might happen if humanity continues on its path of destruction. Many of the climate fictions are set in future to make the people aware about consequences of human exploitation of nature. In this sense, Aristotle view of literature becomes more relevant. He believes that, the literature can project objects potentially harmful in nature can be depicted and studied in close proximity without fear. This same happens with climate fictions. It gives the

picture of the immediate future from a closer proximity and thus, to make people aware about the impending dangers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Using a qualitative methodology, the study of climate fiction (cli-fi) examines how works of literature and film that deal with climate change affect readers' and viewers' knowledge of environmental concerns. The research illustrates how climate fiction promotes climate consciousness by looking at key works such as J.G. Ballard's books, Emmerich's film *The Day After Tomorrow*, and other cross-genre media. The study employs narrative analysis to examine how these tales depict the interactions between humans and nature, discuss the human-caused causes of global warming, and stimulate moral considerations about environmental stewardship. In order to contextualize the genre's development and societal relevance, the research also takes into account the transnational and transmedial nature of cli-fi, according to Julia Leyda's framework on its thematic and stylistic aspects. It also incorporates perspectives from environmentalists and cultural critics.

RESULTS

According to the study, cli-fi, or climate fiction, has become a prominent genre that successfully spreads knowledge of climate change through a variety of media, such as comics, movies, and books. This study emphasizes cli-fi's capacity to convey climate change messages to a wide range of international audiences by utilizing Julia Leyda's framework, which emphasizes the genre's transnational, didactic, and political aspects. J.G.

Ballard's works and **The Day After Tomorrow** are two examples of how cli-fi may effectively convey the urgency and universal relevance of climate challenges. A narrative analysis of these works shows that cli-fi inspires readers and viewers to think about their part in climate change by promoting ethical contemplation in addition to communicating scientific issues. This demonstrates that cli-fi is a powerful forum for public involvement and environmental activism.

DISCUSSION

Literature focused on climatic changes has become a major trend in English language publishing and reading over last couple of decades and we categorize such works of literature under the title climate fiction or Cli-fi. By the end of the twentieth century environmentalists and cultural critics rightly ask why authors (simply artists in general) were not more engaged with the subject. A decade later, a great number of works centered on natural and anthropogenic climate change were published in the different parts of the globe. The reason for the expansion of this artistic and scholarly attention on climate change fiction lies in the climatic changes that we feel in our everyday life, but an additional stimulus is the hope that these plays, novels, short stories, poems and children's stories might lead to a wider and deeper climate consciousness and thereby contribute to an optimistic and practical environmental policies and politics.

Since the early 2000s, when it came to the attention of a wider public, climate change has been generally recognized as one of the greatest challenges faced by the humanity in the twenty-first century. As human life is more attached and dependent on the nature and ecology, the threats on natural world and climatic change became a serious topic of debate all across the globe. Climate change fiction or cli-fi, thus, deals with these climatic changes and ecological or environmental threats from a fictional point of view to make the people aware about these serious issues and thus, to enable them to find remedies for these problems.

Cli-fi simply means climate fiction. It is actually a vast array of different kinds of literary products, everything from memoirs that have some kind of emphasis on the climatic change (so not necessarily fictive and may have some fictive elements like all memoirs have) to novels to youth-fictions (there is a great YA series of fictions out there that, in various respects touch on climatic change) to films. So, climate fiction, also known as climate change fiction, is a very broad multimedia, multi-genre project that many artists, filmmakers and authors have been pursuing in an attempt to tell the story of climate change. My own feeling, in considering climate fiction, is that cli-fi could be a much more capacious term.

The term cli-fi was coined by an American filmmaker and environmentalist named Dan Bloom. It was first appeared in 2007, in one of his tweets. He called this term as a sub-genre of Sci-fi or science fiction. The letters 'cli' stand for the first letters of 'climate' and 'fi' stands for fiction. In this way 'cli-fi' stands for 'climate fiction' as 'sci-fi' stands for 'science fiction'. In Dan's perception Cli-fi is like a sister to Sci-fi. Cli-fi, in short, is a literary and cinematic platform for artists and writers to share

their ideas and make their audience and readers aware about the climatic changes and other ecological or environmental threats around them.

So what is climate fiction? It's actually not a straightforward question because authors, writers, critics and filmmakers alike are still trying to figure that out. We have seen a lot more writers writing about climate change in the last couple of decades and we have started to use the phrase climate fiction or cli-fi to differentiate it from other types of writing. The new genre really grew over the last few years and this is because of a couple of reasons. One, climate change has just become a much more urgent problem. The second one may be the crasser reason but there has become a publishing market for it. Readers are more eager to read about climate change in novels and short stories and in some bookstores, you will even start to see shelves that say cli-fi up against their sci-fi or fantasy bookshelves.

Writers are creating climate fiction for all kinds of reasons. Some of them have scientific backgrounds and this is a way to draw on their backgrounds and put it in a narrative form, but not all of them. I think most climate fiction writers, are creating their novels because they have anxiety about what is happening in the world right now. Beyond just using their stories as a way to process climate anxieties, it also seems like writers and filmmakers of climate fiction are hoping some kind of change. They hope that, may be by reading them a new activist, or climate conscious voter will appear.

Maybe it would better if we take a step back and try to understand where climate fiction came from before we can figure out its actual impact on our brains and society. It is believed that, climate fiction really began with J G Ballard's 1962 *Drowned World*. It is a novel about global wide climate change that was caused by human activity. His other novels like *The Wind from Nowhere* (1961), *The Burning World* also known as *The Drought* (1964) and *Hello America* (1981) deal with similar climatic changes caused by human activities. But we can actually go back even further than that to Jules Verne's works like *A Floating City* (1871) *A Winter Amid the Ice* (1855). Jules Verne is often considered to be the starting point of sci-fi. And if we go back even further than that we can land on Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. Where, in the background of that novel, we see all kinds of climatic changes. Another novel that is often left out of these conversations is Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which came out in 1939 and was about Dust Bowl which was another large-scale environmental catastrophe caused by human activity.

Every decade of twentieth century, but particularly in the second half, has had some versions, some different take on cli-fi, or anthropogenic climate change, or environment in general. B-movies surrounding nuclear anxiety and radiation were particularly popular in the 1950s and the early 1960s. In 1966 Harry Harrison wrote *Make Room Make Room*, which was later adapted into film under the title *Soylent Green* in 1973. The film dealt with the topic of overpopulation. And throughout the 1970s and 1980s we saw a lot of works that were concerned with the effects of nuclear war both on environment and on the

population. And of course, there is the Mad Max trilogy which helped codify this sort of nondescript post nuclear dystopia. And this was even more overt in its follow-up: 2015's Mad Max Fury Road, which is according to me, one of the best movies ever happened.

When we start getting into the 90s, the trend starts turning more towards stories that centres around the societal damage that comes about as a result of climate change in relation with usually other things. But mostly climate change. So we have Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and it's follow up *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which centres around a sort of much more subtle and realistic climate disaster and government inaction in the face of climate change that ultimately leading to societal collapse. Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam Trilogy*, which started with *Oryx and Crake* also centres around a sort of confluence of things ultimately leading to overconsumption, overpopulation and, of course, climate change.

On the more on the nose side of things, we saw movies like *Water World*, 10 where the world is covered in water and we Kevin Costner peeing in cup and drinks it. The film gives an image of a world where drinking water is scares and man is even forced to drink his urine. There are also lots of other films where climate change is not the central conflict, but also a huge part of the narrative. In the original 1950s film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Klaatu shows up and tells humanity that you need to stop doing nuclear war or we will kill you. But in the 2008 remake Keanu Reeves shows up and tells everybody that you need to stop doing climate change, or we will kill you. And lately the trend has been films that are not centrally about climate change but incorporated in their narrative.

In the last decade climate fiction is not just science fiction anymore. We are now seeing writers write about climate in realm of fantasy (like Rita Indiana's 2015 novel *Tentacle*), in the realm of romance (Berit Ellingsen's *Not Dark Yet*) and actually in the realm of realist fiction like Belle Boggs' *The Gulf: A Novel* (2019). Those would be books that are set in the present tense, here in the real world and talking about climate change as it is unfolding as we see it.

Certainly climate has been an undercurrent of a lot of media for a really long time. And they have played a crucial role in changing the attitude of 'climate silence' in the society. The idea of 'climate silence' is that, most of the people will never hear or talk about climate change. And it is a real thing and this phenomenon is called 'climate silence'. And so it seems like climate fiction helps change that. There is a recent study which suggests that among the people who read climate fiction, almost one half of them are much more likely to talk about the book, and by extension climate change, with their friends and family. Even those with whom it is been really difficult to talk about climate change in the past. And the more conversations we have, the better.

When most people think of climate change fiction they tend to think of dystopian or post-apocalyptic narratives. But we can see examples of more collective action. In Kim Stanley

Robinson's *New York in 2140* or Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* – in these books we see people are working together to get through a crisis, and that shows a beautiful model that if readers could adapt this in the real world could actually start to change things. We have a direct exposure to this in the last two flood where we stood together to overcome the crises.

Reading and watching climate fiction obviously is not the only way people come in contact with climate stories. There is definitely a lot of climate focused nonfiction works out there too. The best thing that nonfiction does really well is that it presents facts and figures and scientific evidence. And for readers who respond really well to that kind of evidence, they are going to be much more persuaded by nonfiction. One thing that I do think that fiction does really well is that it presents the irrationality of human behavior, by which it mean, our intense reliance on fossil fuels, and this unchecked reliance on the fossil fuels is destroying our planet. And until and unless we really face the irrationality of our behavior, we are not going to change. And what these climate fictions really do is that, it persuades us to change our behavior.

Considering all these, it is important to see the different types of climate fictions. There are two different approaches on climate fiction as we mentioned in the introduction. Climate change fiction or cli-fi is divided into two categories: 'what is' and 'what would be'. In other words we have some authors who are writing about climate change in the near or even distant future where human beings are still on earth but they are living in a post global catastrophic event and are dealing with the various tragedies. And such novels also deal with the ways that climate change is affecting their everyday lives and their organizational systems as we know now. On the other hand, we have authors who are writing closer to the present time and are writing about the wonderful human stories about scientists or other types of heroes who are dealing with climate change. Perhaps most of such novels give an image of a humanity that is on the cusp of some kind catastrophic event. And so the narratives in the two different time frames unfold little bit differently. One make people aware about the climatic changes caused, both by nature and man, and enables them to do accordingly to overcome the present situation, while the other warns the humanity about the climate changes in the near and distant future.

Why cli-fi is so important is that it takes all these possible futures into imagination and turns it into a narrative, so, it can be easily digested and better understood. One thing that I think is that, all people's, not only literary people's, experience is that, we are much more likely to be convinced of something or even just more likely to understand something if it is presented to us as a narrative and not just an series of facts. And this is the significance of climate fictions that it gives a good and easy understanding about our environment and the changes in the environment and climate.

CONCLUSION

Climate fiction, though initially was considered inept for a full-fledged investigation of the risks of climate change, it is impossible to investigate climate change without the

environmental and socio-cultural relevance that an eco-fiction offers. In this sense, what I have to say is that, do not let the term cli-fi and its association with phrase sci-fi turns you off. The thing about cli-fi is that it crosses so many genres and the chances are is that here is some form of the genre out there is that will really appeal to whatever your individual taste is and it is to be added that the study of ecology and environmentalism in literature is in itself not a new thing.

Climate fiction is not merely a study of climate change and projection of its after effects; on the other hand it is an investigation of climatic changes in a much wider scenario of socio political impacts of these climate changes. Both Emmerich's movie *The Day After Tomorrow* and Ballard's novel *The Drought* deals with these socio political implications and impacts of climate changes.

Climate fictions portrays humans intricate relationship with the nature and thereby points out the anthropogenic dimensions of global warming. It also rises the ethical questions about man's responsibility towards nature and climatic changes. Thus, climate change fictions serves great many purposes including making people aware about climate change issues and points out human responsibility. These Ballardian novel and Emmerich film does this very thing, they give the readers or audience both a good reading or watching experience and make people aware about the issues of climate change. The only difference is in the percentage of the number of audience. As we live in the clutches of the visual media stricken world, the films have a much wider audience than a novel. It also interesting to note that the number of climate fiction movies is increases each day, so is its audience.

According to Julia Leyda, the famous film journalist, social activist, climate fiction has some specific characteristics. These qualities are put forward with seven keywords: contemporary, controversial, trans-medial, transnational, didactic, generic and political (Leyda, 2016:12). For Leyda climate fictions or cli-fi is a transnational and trans-medial genre. These works do not have particular boundaries, even when the novel or film or any climate fiction set in a particular geographical area, it addresses the issue in a global scale. Again cli fi includes a wide variety of media ranging from literature to cultural studies and from comic books to full-fledged novels and films.

Ban Ki-moon, former secretary general of United Nations, in one of his speech told that; "We are the first generation to be able to end poverty, and the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Future generation will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities." (Ban Ki-moon) Writers and artists of every generation were much aware about what he told. And climate fiction is an attempt to make people aware about the very fact and thus to enable them to overcome these threats.

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